

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
September 23, 2014 Meeting**

2. **CAR No. 14-093** (K. & J. Brooks)

**2104-2106 Cedar Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct new duplex

Staff Contact:

J. Hill

From the outset of the review of this project it is necessary to understand the timeline of construction activities at this address. Under a building permit issued prior to the designation of the Union Hill area as an Old and Historic District, a previous owner severely compromised the architectural integrity of the double house that stood at this location. As seen in the photographs from the Assessor's Office, the building was a four-bay double house of frame construction with a bracketed cornice and a full-width front porch with turned posts, one half of which was clad in wood weatherboards and the other in asphalt shingle siding over the weatherboards. Under the earlier permit, the previous owner removed every vestige of the older building with the exception of the brick foundation and one set of concrete steps and began the transformation of the building into a six-bay double house with an asphalt-shingle roof. Work ceased and the property went into foreclosure. The area was designated an Old and Historic District in 2009.

The current owner acquired the property in October 2011 and filed for a building permit to complete the work using the 2008 plans. The permit issued to the current owner in May 2012 was for interior work only and advised that CAR approval was necessary before any work could be done on the exterior, specifically including work related to windows, siding and porches.

Because the historic house was essentially demolished prior to the OHD designation, staff's review of the project is based on the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of the structure is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

The new building respects the historic setback as it has been constructed on the foundation of the building that previously occupied the site. The plat plan indicates the plane of the façade is five feet or less from the public sidewalk right-of-way. The city has modified the elevation and grade of numerous streets in the Union Hill OHD as well as introducing sidewalks. There is evidence in this block of adaptation to changed conditions. A house across the street features front stairs that descend across the front of the house from a porch above the original stairs that directly addressed the street, abandoned in place and sheared off to accommodate the public sidewalk. Similar spatial constraints prevent the construction of a full-width porch with stairs leading directly to the sidewalk. Staff recommended to the owner that he consider building covered stoops with side stairs, a convention found nearby in the district, rather than building that stair configuration under a full-width porch roof. The owner has modified the drawings and staff recommend that the Commission consider this as an appropriate and compatible way to address the site constraints.

3. *New structures should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The proposed addition faces Cedar Street, the only street bordering the site.

FORM

1. *New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the immediate area. Building form refers to the specific combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections, and roof shapes that lend identity to a structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The current form of the building (including the roof) was established by the work done under the permit issued prior to the designation of the area as an Old and Historic District. The building form is generally compatible in massing, size, symmetry, proportions and projections. The proposed stoops with side stairs are a form found elsewhere in the district.

SCALE

1. *New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is discouraged.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

2. *New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

The proposed design calls for front stoops that are consistent with a residential form found nearby within the district.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

The existing street elevation height, as observed, appears to be compatible with the heights of the other two-story houses in the block. The building height was established prior to the designation of the area as an Old and Historic District.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

The design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

3. *Typical massing patterns throughout city historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers, or elaborate balconies.*

The applicant has proposed a solid, block-like design that is compatible with the massing of residential properties in the neighborhood.

MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS

1. *New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard is not applicable only because the original architectural elements were destroyed by the previous owner prior to the designation of the area as an Old and Historic District.

2. *Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale, and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

This standard is not applicable as the historic building is the missing element. The goal of this review is that the project result in a compatible replacement building on the foundation of the original building.

3. *Materials used in new construction should be compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.*

Because this is new construction, the smooth-finished lapped fiber-cement siding on the side elevations appears to be compatible for use on the front of the house. The stoops should have turned wood porch posts, tongue-and-groove flooring, and metal roofing. The stoop railings and stair handrails should be of wood and in the style of the Richmond rail. Asphalt shingles are in use for the main roof of the building and are sometimes permitted for new construction. The current grid-between-glass 6/6 windows, recently installed, are not compatible with the appearance of historic windows in the Old and Historic District.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant has not indicated final color selections. Staff recommend that the applicant submit colors drawn from the approved palette to CAR staff for administrative review and approval.

5. *Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted for use in City Old and Historic Districts. Other synthetic siding materials with a smooth, untextured finish may be allowed in limited cases, but approval by the Commission is always required.*

The partially installed siding is an appropriate cementitious siding with a smooth, untextured finish.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The applicant recently installed windows with grid-between-glass muntins, indicated as inappropriate. Staff recommend the use of double-hung wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash with true- or simulated-divided lites.

The overall building form, scale, siting, and massing appear to be compatible with the Church Hill North Old and Historic District, and staff recommends approval of the application provided that the applicant can confirm the requested information (construction materials and details for the stoops and railings, material and detail for the windows) for the Commission's approval with the remainder of the requested items (exterior paint colors and light fixtures) for delegation to staff for administrative review and approval.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions noted above, the project is consistent with Richmond City Code Section 114-930.7 (c) Standards for New Construction, as well as the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission in accordance with Section 114-930.7 (g) of the Code.